



Buildings Sufficient to House Over Ten Thousand Persons Condemned in Omaha

By JOHN H. KEARNES.

Using the powers of his office, one Omaha man, in a period of six years, has condemned to complete destruction enough buildings to make up a thriving county seat town the size of Papillion. As a result of his work he has seen these buildings replaced by modern brick structures which would house and provide tenant space for a city the size of Fremont.

During the term he has been deputy state fire warden and fire warden of the city of Omaha, John C. Trouton has condemned 118 buildings. Many of these were in downtown districts, in the center of the congested section and many more were in the residence districts.

They ranged from tumbledown shacks and shanties to apparently comfortable cottages or substantial business buildings, but, after expert inspection by him, proved to be fire traps or structures so faultily built that they were menaces to human life.

Changes in Scenes.

Wholesale condemnation of these buildings has made a startling change in the architectural appearance of many districts of the city for the reason that the unsightly edifices ordered destroyed for the safety of life and property have been replaced by great skyscrapers, modern factory buildings, hotels, by one-story brick buildings known as "taxpayers," and by handsome homes.

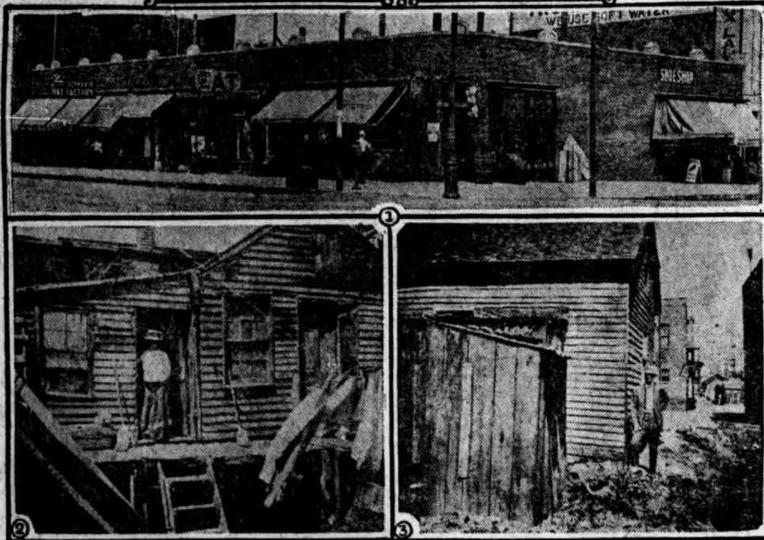
In the six years he has been acting as fire warden Mr. Trouton has had many illuminating experiences with the greatest enemy of humanity, carelessness.

It is his duty to inspect every structure within the city limits that offers hazard to life and property. Where he finds a frame structure where the process of decay has set in to such an extent that it is no longer subject to reasonable upkeep, and where its location is such that its proximity to neighboring property of value or avenues of traffic cause it to be a danger to public safety, he starts condemnation proceedings which eventually result in its being torn down. The clearing of lots otherwise desirable leads to replacement with modern buildings.

To provide, as nearly as is humanly possible, against danger to public safety as a result of carelessness, criminal negligence or intent, Omaha's fire marshal must keep his eyes open all the time. His working hours are devoted to a continual search for mantraps, firetraps, firebugs, and the vast army of fortuitous circumstances which combine to make up the army engaged in eternal warfare against human life and property.

In Path of Duty.

His duty takes him from the uttermost recesses of dank, gloomy cellars to the roofs of the highest skyscrapers, from junk heaps to bank vaults, and in his search of all the nooks and crannies of the structures typical of the city he sees more of the insides and outsides of Omaha than most any other man. On a school building or hotel he may find a fire escape that is so badly worn or rusted, so loosely attached to the superstructure of the building that the weight of three or four persons in an emergency might break it down and leave the rest of the occupants of the edifice to the mercy of the



No. 1 - "Taxpayer," a type of temporary building replacing structures such as Nos. 2 and 3, condemned. These buildings are located on strategic corners, awaiting development and such time as will justify the erection of permanent structures. The "Taxpayer" is a substantial business building designed to pay expenses of taxation and nominal interest rate on investment.

No. 4 - Type of permanent building, replacing structures such as No. 2, condemned. Representing the final phase of investment and building improvement of a developed strategic corner made possible by growth of the city.

flames in case of a fire, he notifies the careless owner to replace it. In another densely inhabited building he will find hallways leading to exits and fire escapes so cluttered up and obstructed with furniture that they could not be used in a crisis. He notifies the careless owner to cure this condition.

It has been his experience to inspect buildings where he found the windows providing approach to fire escapes nailed down so as to prevent use in the event of fire and panic.

Investigation of factories and mercantile establishments are in many instances revelations of carelessness. In stores and garages he has found as many as 100 gallons of gasoline at a time in open tanks, gases rising from them and filling the room. Only a spark or a match would be needed to provide a holocaust.

Inflammable Waste.

In the basements of some of the most populous buildings he has found bunches of inflammable waste close to elevator shafts and arcways. Spontaneous combustion and a draft to fan the flames were all that would be needed to provide the combination of circumstances which would cause one of those mysterious, destructive



conflagrations, described by reporters as being of "unknown" origin. Trouton is only one of an army of sentries who are constantly on the watch to prevent loss of life and property by the "fire fiend." The insurance companies which annually bet millions of dollars on the hazard that Omaha will not be destroyed or severely scorched by a gigantic fire have their men watching continuously for the weak spots of attack.

In all the home offices in New York, Hartford, London, Liverpool, wherever risks are written, are huge maps showing the nature of the buildings of Omaha, the character of their occupants, the classes of business or industries conducted in them, faults of construction which make them susceptible to fire loss, the extent of fireproofing or lack of it, and the number and character of watchmen employed. These men work, as does Trouton, from the center of the city out to the suburbs and they report to their chiefs every defect their practiced eyes take in.

They know that a woodworking plant is in constant danger from spontaneous combustion due from scrap lumber, shavings and sawdust accumulations. They also realize that flour mills and malting plants are susceptible to destruction by explosion of flour and other dusts. "Arson Trust." They know that paint and oil factories, warehouses and stores make the most dangerous fires and the ones hardest to combat with water. Then in every big city there is always the "arson trust" and the fire warden has a veritable museum of relics of firebugs which he has collected in the last few years. He has found fires started with incendiary purposes in which two gas jets figured. They were located in a storeroom where the stock of goods was low and the insurance high. One jet was left open, the other well lighted. It only took a few hours for the room to fill with gas, which was soon ignited with explosive force by the flame from the companion jet. There was a fire and the stock of goods was sold to the

Is Parrot a Member of the Family and is It Entitled to Sugar Ration? Ask Victor

Officials of the Omaha food administration are all wrought up on just how to classify a parrot on the sugar-consuming proposition. The proposition is a knotty one, as there is nothing in the books, or Hoover rulings relative to the matter. The upshot of the whole matter is that officials of the food department of the government have put their heads together and eventually they hope to

insurance companies as the result of a "gas leak."

A fire occurred in a house on South Thirteenth street. The fire department defeated the "fire fiend" and the flames were quenched before the house was completely gutted. Trouton made an examination and found a rope of oil-soaked rags, partially charred, leading to an open bucket of gasoline. The owners made no claim for insurance.

Firebugs have been known to lay an ordinary powder fuse from a point outside the building to a pan of gasoline or kerosene. They would light the fuse, which would burn slowly, and several hours after the firebug had departed there would be sudden ignition, an explosion that would nearly blow the building off its sills and then a fire.

Combustibles have been known to have been piled in rooms and then set afire by a heated brick thrown through the window. Pastels of incendiary chemicals are frequently used and in some rare cases "Old Sol" has been used in the capacity of a firebug by the placing of glass at such an angle from a frame building that the concentration of the sun's rays has caused combustion.

Trust Broken Up. In 1912 and 1913 there was an arson trust operating in the city which destroyed, for pay, thousands of dollars worth of property, but which was finally broken up by the efficient work of the fire warden's department.

Mr. Trouton has been compelled to play detective for the purpose of getting arson evidence on several occasions. Recently he suspected a couple of men of starting a fire and, to get the goods on them, he obtained a board at the same house where they were staying, got into the good graces of their landlady and after a time got sufficient circumstantial evidence to make it embarrassing for the suspects. He put in five hours of cross-questioning the men and obtained a confession.

The greatest menace to the safety of life and property, Mr. Trouton declares, is carelessness in the home. Children playing with matches, handling kerosene lamps, or fanning burning rags or paper into flames cause many fires. Their mothers, too, endanger lives and property by washing garments or their hair in open pans of gasoline. Father does his share by letting "paper, waste in the cellars or in the attics to ignite by spontaneous combustion.

As a result of the inspections that are now being made and the ordinances compelling moving picture films, explosives, oils and paints and dangerous chemicals in fire-proofed rooms, big fires in Omaha are not as frequent, population and congestion considered, as they were during the period preceding a decade ago.

hand down a decision that will settle the parrot problem for all future generations and food administrations. The cause of all the commotion in the food administration department came out this way. Mrs. Mary G. Grandon, Bemis park, is the owner of a green parrot that, according to her statement to County Food Administrator Allen, "is almost human."

The other day Mrs. Grandon visited the office of Vic Parrish, chief factotem under Federal Food Administrator Wattles and confided to him that she wanted to take out a sugar card for her parrot, insisting that in order to live, the aforesaid parrot must have its regular sugar ration.

Not finding anything in the books authorizing the issuance of sugar cards to parrots, Mr. Parrish informed the woman that he was powerless to grant relief unless Mrs. Grandon would make an affidavit that the parrot was a member of the family.

Not being willing to thus swear, Mrs. Grandon was referred to County

Food Administrator Allen. He listened to the appeal of the woman, shook his head and remarked: "No sugar here for parrots. I'd suggest you pull the bird's sugar tooth."

The woman started to leave the office, feeling that she was not being treated with the proper respect. As she reached the door, Mr. Allen called her back, saying: "We have a man in the next room who is authority on the construction of the law relative to the distribution of sugar."

Mrs. Grandon's face was wreathed in smiles, for she fancied that her parrot was going to be placed on the sugar-drawing ration list. She was escorted to the room of E. M. Fairfield, government director of enforcement. To him she stated the case, insisting that the parrot must have a little sugar for its crackers, adding, "I can't afford to give it sugar from my allowance."

Mr. Fairfield thought and then thought some more, after which he tried to solve the problem, informing Mrs. Grandon that the "only thing I see for you to do is to install your parrot as family butler. There is a provision made for drawing a sugar ration for the butler and if you do not have one you can get around the law in this way and at the same time draw a sugar ration for your family."

"One of the most exciting experiences I ever had," said Ensign Walter Grantham of the Salvation Army, "didn't happen to me at all." (The ensign came from Ireland, as one can readily see.) "We went on a picnic out to the fisheries at South Bend one Sunday several weeks ago. Those who have been there will remember the road runs down a steep hill and makes a turn at the edge of the fish pond. While we were enjoying our lunch a sifter with two men and four women stopped at the top of the hill and one man and two of the women got out. The rest proceeded down the hill, one of the women driving. She seemed to lose control of the car, or the brakes would not work, for the car suddenly shot forward and plunged down the hill and straight into the pond. There was a big splash and then the water was churning with the frantic struggles of the occupants of the car, who were fortunately all thrown clear of the machine.

"I rushed down and reached in from the bank and got hold of the hand of one of the girls. 'Pull me out! Pull me out!' She screamed. I surely wasn't trying to push her in. Finally I got her onto the bank and others assisted the other woman and the man. None of them was at all hurt, by some miracle. "It so happened there was a big picnic near, made up of the composition room employees of one of the Omaha newspapers, I understood. A woman among them had a camera and immediately asked the rescued trio to allow her to photograph them, which they consented to do. It was the first time I ever knew a woman to submit to photographing when her hair was mussed up. "When the car ran away the other three, who had got out, came tearing down the hill. Just as the camera snapped the two girls passed me, and I heard one of them say to the other, 'Just because we got out, they don't want to take us. I wish we had stayed in so we could have our picture in the paper.' Can you beat that? She was willing to risk her life for the sake of having her photo published."

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"It's me for the Klondike," exclaimed George Horton, who lives out on the Prettiest Mile road in the vicinity of Miller Park. It was one of those hot days when Horton boiled, fied and sizzled as he hunted for a cool place that did not exist.

George Horton had not always lived in Omaha and consequently he had not become entirely acclimated. Prior to coming here a couple of years ago he had spent several summers up around the Arctic circle, hence his longing for the Klondike. And as to the Klondike in its summer weather, he had this to say:

"When it comes to the real thing in connection with summer weather, give me the Klondike in preference to Omaha. There is no 100 degrees in the shade weather in that northern country and I just want to say a few words telling what August weather up there is like. Three years ago this August I was prospecting for gold at a point about 200 miles north of Nome. One day that I remember, the morning started in with a temperature of 56 degrees below zero, slightly cool for that time in the year. By noon the temperature had risen to 10 above zero and an hour later the snow was melting. At 4 o'clock the mercury had risen to 60 above and the snow that had been six feet deep on the level had about all disappeared. It kept growing warmer until 6 o'clock, when the thermometer recorded 80 degrees above. That was real summer and the kind of weather that invigorates and makes your blood tingle. That night the temperature dropped back to 30 degrees below zero and while the mercury flitted up and down the tube, the weather was much more enjoyable than the Nebraska brand that drops in on you, climbs to 100 degrees and remains there for several days and nights without a break.

Mussed Up

Some Heat